

February 18, 2009

Dear Members of the Government Administration and Elections Committee:

Minority representation on elected and appointed boards and commissions, required by Connecticut statute and the Bethel Town Charter, serves the worthy purpose of ensuring representation for the greatest number of voters regardless of which political party wins the election and makes the appointments. The winning party has no more than two-thirds of the positions, and the losing party or parties are guaranteed at least one-third of the positions. So it has been for many years, political power swings gradually back and forth, everyone feels satisfied they have a voice, and town business can be conducted cooperatively and respectfully.

The practice of cross-endorsement of a candidate by more than one political party has recently been used in Bethel to circumvent the purpose of minority representation. Rather than ensuring representation for the greatest number of voters, the practice of cross-endorsements has been manipulated, legally, to systematically remove Democrats from elected positions, thus disenfranchising everyone who voted for Democratic candidates.

Connecticut Statutes Chapter 146 Sec. 9-167a currently provides in Subsec. (g): "...a person shall be deemed to be a member of the political party on whose enrollment list his name appears on the date of his appointment to, or his nomination as a candidate for election to, any office...and provided further any person whose candidacy for election to an office is solely as the candidate of a party other than the party with which he is enrolled shall be deemed to be a member of the party of which he is such candidate." Thus, a candidate who is an enrolled member of a marginal party such as the Independent Party (117 members) or the Pro-Bethel Party (5 members) may be cross-endorsed and appear on the ballot line of a major political party, in Bethel's case, the Republican Party. If the candidate appears only on a single ballot line, and is elected, he is counted as a member of the party which endorsed him and placed him on the ballot. That is fair, and is the result that Representative Bartlett's Proposed Bill No. 5964 would extend.

The present inequity, the circumvention of the balance of power, and the disenfranchisement of voters, occurs when a candidate who is an enrolled member of a marginal party, is cross-endorsed and appears on the ballot as a candidate for his own party as well as one or more other parties. Even though he wins because of the votes he received, in this case, on the Republican line of the ballot, the fact that he also ran as the candidate of his own party means he is counted not as a Republican, but as a representative of his enrolled party: Independent Party, Pro-Bethel Party, or as Unaffiliated. Thus, candidates elected from the Republican line of the ballot can be counted toward fulfilling the requirement for "minority representation" even though Republican candidates are the elected majority.

Presently in Bethel there are no Democrats on the Board of Finance. There is only one Democrat on the Board of Education. There are over 3000 registered Democrats in Bethel who have been deprived of their fair representation in town government. The current Republican administration has followed the same methodology in its appointments to town boards and commissions,

favoring Independent Party, Pro-Bethel Party, and unaffiliated voters over experienced and willing Democrats. The Democratic Party has been systematically removed from its rightful role in town government.

The current law allows this situation to exist, and permits any major political party to manipulate cross-endorsements and minority representation to exclude members of the other major party. Regardless of which party is in power, members of the excluded party are disenfranchised and the purpose of minority representation as a means of maintaining a truly representative balance of power is thwarted.

The amendment put forth by State Representative Jason Bartlett in Proposed Bill No. 5964 would restore the balance of power and guarantee real representation to the greatest number of voters regardless of which party wins an election. I urge you to lend your support to this effort.

Sincerely,

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Ideas:

Do bios of new members, and bios of replaced members - what expertise has been lost

Do counts by party for Bds and Comm, and for number of registered voters.

Do counts by gender for Bds and Comm, and for number of registered voters.

Film Bd of Finance meetings